
Papers

Explorations into Children's Literature

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The cover image by Ernest H. Shepard, from *Dream Days* by Kenneth Grahame, London, John Lane/Bodley Head, 1942; p 81.

EDITORIAL

At the time this issue of *Papers* is being published, children (or rather, claims as to children's needs and interests) are again prominent in Australian political discourse. The Prime Minister John Howard has criticised the state school system for offering Australian children what he terms a 'politically correct' style of education, while on the Labor side of politics, Mark Latham, the Leader of the Opposition, proclaims his support for parents who read to their young children and promises that his party will develop policies to ensure that all Australian children enjoy the experience of having stories read to them by their parents and caregivers. These statements about children and those who are responsible for them relate not so much to specific policy positions (given that the two dominant Australian political parties are increasingly centrist, competing for the votes of a predominantly middle-class population) as to the potency of children as figures symbolic of the nation and its future. To Howard, the prospect of young Australians 'infected' by 'political correctness' seems to augur a future in which the 'traditional' values incorporated within his definition of 'mateship' are threatened by the values associated with an 'intellectual elite' stubbornly fixated on liberal ideals of cultural diversity, reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians and environmentalist perspectives. For his part, Latham seeks to draw attention to a complex of ideas around 'family values', many of which centre upon the competing demands of work and home, especially as they relate to the role of fathers in families with young children.

Of course, the language of 'political correctness' and 'family-friendly policies' as used, respectively, by Howard and Latham, has much more to do with its appeal to voters in an election year than with substantive questions about Australian children, their education and their experience of family life. What is interesting is how both politicians (Howard as a grandfather-figure, Latham as a father of young children) bring children to the foreground as 'goods to think with', conscious that there is no more potent symbol than that of the child in discussions of nationhood and national values. Those of us who work in the field of children's literature know how fraught and complex are relations between cultural production for children and national identities and ideals. In this issue of *Papers*, four authors reflect on values and ideologies as they manifest in children's literature from Australia, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Svein Slettan's essay, 'Romantic Love in Norwegian Children's Literature: Tormod Haugen's *The Georg and Gloria Trilogy*' considers representations of romantic love in Norwegian and Swedish texts for children and focuses on the humorous, ironic and parodic strategies used by the Norwegian author Tormod Haugen in a trilogy of novels which traces the intersubjective relations of the protagonists, Georg and Gloria. Slettan sees Haugen's trilogy as incorporating a sequence of three stages: the heroic project, the pastoral idyll, and the love tragedy; and he argues that Haugen's trilogy is informed

both by conventions and genre expectations in regard to love stories, and by strategies which achieve 'lightness and distance'. Representations of race and racialised identities are explored in Karen Sands-O'Connor's essay 'Smashing Birds in the Wilderness: British Racial and Cultural Integration from Insider and Outsider Perspectives', which focuses on a group of Young Adult novels thematising British multiculturalism as it plays out in relations between young characters of different ethnic origins. Sands-O'Connor's analysis of these texts suggests that in many cases racial and cultural difference is named through descriptions of characters, but not pursued through thematics or language. When questions of community relations and individual identities are addressed, they are, Sands-O'Connor maintains, represented through shallow and celebratory treatments which belie the complexities of British multiculturalism.

In 'Hairy on the Inside: From Cannibals to Paedophiles', Carolyn Daniel considers the fascinating topic of cannibalism and its uses as a trope in colonial literature, contemporary fantasy (Phillip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' trilogy), colonial writing, horror fiction and fairy tales. Episodes of cannibalism and metaphorical allusions to perverse forms of ingestion assume different forms and perform functions inflected by historical and cultural contexts, but they are apt to construct distinctions between self and Other. Finally, Brooke Collins-Gearing's essay, 'Imagining Indigenality in Romance and Fantasy Fiction for Children', considers how romance and fantasy fiction by non-Indigenous authors from the nineteenth through to the twentieth century position non-Indigenous readers as the natural, 'normal' inhabitants of the Australian nation through strategies of appropriation and indigenisation. At the same time, these

narratives exclude Indigenous children from the category 'Australian children' and construct narrators as experts on Aboriginal culture and traditions. Rather than using the figure of the child as a cipher capable of signifying the facile oppositions which all too often substitute for discussions of social and national values, these essays recognise the complex strategies through which fiction for children positions its readers. They point to the gaps, silences and inconsistencies which careful reading can uncover, and which testify to adult anxieties as they are projected onto children.

Clare Bradford



ERRATA

We owe an apology to Kerry Mallan, our latest referee to join the *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature* team from the last issue. We welcomed her by mis-spelling her name and incorrectly stating her location, which *should* have been given as the Queensland University of Technology. Our contrite apologies are offered to her.